

MY CRANE MOUNTAIN HOME: RARE NORTH COUNTRY PHOTOGRAPHS NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH THE ADIRONDACK RESEARCH LIBRARY

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The Adirondack Research Library is proud to announce a collection of historic images are now available online. The Osmond D. Putnam Photographs (ARL-081) contain 132 original glass plate negatives taken in the 1880s. The images document rural education, ecological destruction from logging, homesteading, mountain views and the people of Johnsbury, NY. Although select prints survive at other institutions, most images are being seen for the first time in over a century.

The images were taken by Reverend Osmond David Putnam. Though new to the art form, he had a critical eye for composition. His images provide a glimpse into the close of the 19th century, as the Adirondacks moved from an isolated wilderness to a permanently settled part of the state.

Johnsbury, a town in the northwest corner of Warren County, began to grow with the coming of the railroad in 1871. Situated on Mill Creek near the Hudson River, the damming of several streams helped develop a thriving lumber industry accompanied by mills and tanneries. Despite the harsh climate, small farms dotted the landscape as the early economy was dependent on its natural resources. Though the exploitation of nature helped drive the economy, it was not to last forever. With the establishment of New York's Forest Preserve and later the Adirondack Park, industry would come under regulation eventually putting an end to runaway lumbering.

Life in the Adirondacks was not easy. In writing about the Town of Johnsbury, Noel Riedinger-Johnson describes:

“While most men farmed and lumbered, women worked as wives and mothers caring for their families. Their long days were filled with endless rounds of cooking and baking, sewing and washing, spinning and weaving. Most of the clothes, blankets, carpets and curtains were made in the home. During growing season, the women helped care for the family garden...and finally when men went off to the lumber shanties in winter, women tended the livestock and fires as well.”

O.D. Putnam (1861-1926) was the grandson of Enos Putnam (1810-1865), a Methodist minister and abolitionist who preached at the Mill Creek Wesleyan Methodist Church in Johnsbury. The church was built by Putnam in 1859 after separating from the Methodist Episcopal Church whose senior leadership had refused to speak out against slavery. The Enos Putnam place was a familiar stop along the underground railroad. With direction from his father, O.F. Putnam (1836-1897), Osmond began training to become a minister in the 1880s. To pay for his education, he took photographs with a five-by-eight inch camera, selling prints to rural residents for whom photography was a novel service. The geographic scope of his work was limited to Warren, Essex, and Saratoga Counties due to the range of stage wagons in the area. Though he probably shot other subjects, his Adirondack photographs are all that remain of his work. It is thought that the majority of his photographs, negatives, and equipment were destroyed in a fire at the family's farmhouse in Wilton, NY, in the 1920s. Thankfully, he had given over 100 negatives to his brother Elliot, who in turn gave them to Jeanne Robert Foster. She is included in two of the photographs herself.

When Foster died in 1970, her Adirondack materials were willed to the Riedinger family in Schenectady, NY, finally coming into the possession of Noel Riedinger-Johnson. In 1986, she edited *Adirondack Portraits*: a piece of time, published by Syracuse University Press. The book collected Foster's unpublished poems and prose about the people she knew in her early years in Johnsbury, complimented by Putnam's photographs. In storage since the book's publication, the collection was generously donated to the Adirondack Research Library by Riedinger-Johnson in fall of 2019.

Two Union College librarians personally travelled to South Carolina to pack and transport the collection. Overall, the trip took four days to bring the negatives back to New York State. Per best practices, special care was taken to maintain the original order and title of each image when possible. Archival processing of the collection was completed in early 2020 with a special emphasis placed on preservation. A finding aid for the collection is available online.

To help make these photographs more widely available, a regional collections grant was secured through the Capital District Library Council to digitize the collection. The Northeast Document Conservation Center then scanned each individual negative. The images are now available to the public through New York Heritage.

We are indebted to all the stewards of this collection and are glad it can finally be shared with the wider world. Whether the collection is used for research or for entertainment, we hope you enjoy browsing these images of a bygone era of Adirondack history.

FOR ANY QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS ON THE PHOTOGRAPHS, PLEASE CONTACT US AT ARL@UNION.EDU



Negative 17, Francis Putnam Farm at base of Crane Mountain, circa 1885.



Negative 28, suspension bridge at riverside, circa 1885.



Negative 31A, team of steers and horses in front of house, circa 1885.



Negative 47, logs in the Hudson River, circa 1886.



Negative 83, part of road work with oxen, circa 1886.



Unnumbered negative, WSRR locomotive, circa 1887.

Adirondack Mts., N. Y. - Reflection of White Face Mountain in Au Sable River.



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